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Congress to Study CIA Handling
Of KGB Official's Re-Defection

WASHINGTON—Members of the House and Senate Intelligence committees say their panels plan to conduct lengthy investigations of the Central Intelligence Agency's handling of the surprise re-defection of Vitaly Yurchenko, a former KGB official.

CIA officials held a round of briefings with lawmakers yesterday explaining that Mr. Yurchenko, former deputy chief of the KGB's North American desk, was in this

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city's crowded Georgetown area Saturday evening to have dinner with CIA agents at a small French restaurant, Au Pied de Cochon. He excused himself and then apparently walked or was taken a few blocks up the street to the newly built Soviet compound.

"You've either got a defector who was allowed to just walk away under circumstances I can't accept or you have a double agent planted on the U.S.," said Sen. Patrick Leahy (D., Vt.), vice chairman of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence. "No matter what, something is wrong."

Senate committee members were told that, before the dinner, Mr. Yurchenko appeared to be depressed. There was some speculation that the depression may have been related to Mr. Yurchenko's relationship with a woman who reportedly lives in Canada.

CIA officials indicated during the briefings that they were still unsure whether Mr. Yurchenko voluntarily went to the Soviets or whether he was, somehow, recaptured by Soviet agents waiting for him in the busy Saturday night crowd.

Meanwhile, U.S. officials debriefed Mr. Yurchenko one more time at the State Department last evening and determined he had decided to leave the U.S. under his own free will and that he did not appear to be drugged. Mr. Yurchenko left the State Department in a jubilant mood, holding his hands above his head prize-fighter fashion for waiting television crews. Asked whether he was going to return to Russia, he said: "Yes, home."

CIA Screening Process

Senate committee members said one of the facets of the strange Yurchenko case that they want to examine closely is how the CIA determined that he was a credible defector in the first place. "It's safe to say we're going to want some of the specifics of the screening process," said one Senate committee member, referring to psychological tests and lie-detector examinations that the CIA says it used on Mr. Yurchenko.

The CIA's debriefing of Mr. Yurchenko, who had an overview of the heavily compartmentalized KGB operations in North America, had been expected to take more than a year, according to Reagan administration sources. Periodically, information taken from Yurchenko debriefings was served up at closed hearings to Intelligence Committee members as proof that the CIA was getting an unprecedented windfall of new spy information.

Yesterday, several congressmen said they had been suspicious all along about Mr. Yurchenko's testimony. "We're not experienced in this. We're laymen," said Sen. William Cohen (R., Maine) "but something struck us as not being right. They (the CIA) reassured us, but there were lingering doubts."

'Everybody Was Skeptical'

"Everybody was skeptical," said Sen. Leahy. "The stuff seemed either we were awfully, awfully lucky or he (Mr. Yurchenko) was too good to be true. Now it turns out it was too good to be true. The feeling here is that the CIA was had, and not only the Congress, but the White House had better ask some very serious questions."

"It's not a goof-up, it's not a great tragedy. It's like someone giving you a bag of candy and taking half of it back," said

Senate Intelligence Committee Chairman David Durenberger (R., Minn.).

And not everything Mr. Yurchenko gave his interrogators turned out to be candy. While his ability to reveal Edward L. Howard—a former CIA agent who allegedly gave the Soviets secrets about U.S. operations in Moscow—was touted on Capitol Hill, the Howard case wasn't particularly sweet for the CIA.

One problem was that Mr. Howard apparently was given advance warning about CIA and Federal Bureau of Investigation interest in him and managed to escape arrest. Another was that Mr. Howard had been fired from the CIA in 1983 in a manner that had reportedly left him so angry that he threatened to disclose U.S. secrets to Moscow. A third problem was that Mr. Howard was given sensitive information on U.S. spies in Moscow during what should have been a two-year period of probation and basic training in intelligence.

Adm. Stansfield Turner, director of the CIA during the Carter administration, said he changed an old CIA rule that required agency officials to minimize firings and to simply move agents who had "gone sour" to less sensitive positions until their problems could be addressed. The change, according to Adm. Turner, was made to decrease the danger of moles, or high-level enemy agents within the agency.

Adm. Turner said he wonders how a trainee like Mr. Howard could have acquired sensitive information in the first place. "There's something screwy about that," he said.

The White House still seemed to be in a state of shock over the surprise re-defection of Mr. Yurchenko, but an administration spokesman insisted it would have little effect on this month's summit meeting in Geneva.

The Yurchenko matter was discussed during the White House's morning briefing, "but only as another item," one aide noted. The aide said he didn't expect the incident to spill over into domestic politics, adding: "The American public believes you can't trust the Russians from here to the door anyway. This just underscores that."



Vitaly Yurchenko